

FRANCE 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections. Some laws and policies, such as the prohibition against covering one's face in a public place, restrict religious expression in public, while other laws provide for monitoring of minority religious groups.

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. The majority of the abusive or discriminatory acts were anti-Semitic or anti-Muslim. In 2012, the most recent year for which data is available, the Jewish community recorded a 58 percent increase in the number of anti-Semitic attacks. The Muslim community reported an 11.3 percent increase in anti-Muslim acts in its 2013 figures. There were a number of incidents and court cases relating to police requiring women wearing religious head coverings that also covered their faces to remove the face coverings or come to the police station to verify their identity.

The U.S. government continued to discuss religious freedom with the government, and the embassy actively promoted interfaith dialogue and tolerance among the country's major religious groups, particularly focusing on relations between the Muslim and Jewish communities. Engagement with government officials, private citizens, religious groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) was often conducted in collaboration with U.S. consulates general and American presence posts.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 66 million (July 2013 estimate). The French government does not collect or maintain statistics on religious affiliation for the entire population. Occasional government studies do, however, provide estimates on the population's religious affiliation. According to the latest study by the National Institute for Demographic Studies (INED) conducted in 2008 and published in 2010, 45 percent of respondents aged 18-50 years claimed no religious affiliation, 43 percent identified as Catholic, 8 percent as Muslim, 2 percent as Protestant, and the remaining 2 percent of respondents identified equally among Orthodox Christian, Buddhists, Jewish, and others.

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A poll by the private firm Conseil, Sondage et Analyse (CSA) conducted in 2012 found 56 percent of respondents older than 18 years identify as Roman Catholic. The Ministry of Interior estimates 8 to 10 percent of the population is Muslim. The Muslim population primarily consists of immigrants from former French North African and sub-Saharan colonies and their descendants.

Le Parisien estimates there are 1.2 million Protestants, 500,000 of whom are evangelical. Many evangelical churches are African-style “prosperity” churches composed primarily of African and Antillean immigrants. The Buddhist Union of France estimates there are one million Buddhists, mainly consisting of Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants and their descendants. The Jewish community numbers approximately 600,000 and is comprised of approximately 60 percent Sephardic and 40 percent Ashkenazi Jews. The Jehovah’s Witnesses estimate they have approximately 120,000 members. Orthodox Christians number between 80,000 and 100,000; most are associated with the Greek or Russian Orthodox churches. The Church of Scientology claims 45,000 members. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) estimates its membership at 36,000 in metropolitan France and 22,000 in overseas departments and territories. According to the Sikh community, there are 30,000 Sikhs in metropolitan France with the largest concentration in Parisian suburbs.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom. Some laws and policies restrict religious expression in public, and others provide for monitoring of minority religious group activities.

The constitution and laws, as well as international and European covenants with the force of law, protect the right of individuals to choose, change, and practice their religion. The constitution provides that the country “shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race, or religion. It shall respect all beliefs.” Interference with religious freedom is subject to criminal penalties, including fines and imprisonment. Individuals who are defendants in a trial may challenge the constitutionality of any law they allege impedes their religious freedom.

Strict anti-defamation laws prohibit racially or religiously motivated attacks. For certain crimes, the penalties are increased when the offense is committed because

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of the victim's actual or perceived membership or non-membership in a given ethnic group, nation, race, or religion. The government may expel aliens for inciting discrimination, hatred, or violence against a specific person or group of persons.

Although not legally required, religious groups may apply for tax-exempt status and register to gain official recognition. The government defines two categories under which religious groups may register: associations of worship, which are exempt from taxes, and cultural associations, which normally are not exempt. Associations in either category are subject to certain management and financial disclosure requirements. An association of worship may organize only religious activities, defined as liturgical services and practices. Although not tax-exempt, a cultural association may engage in profit-making activity and receive government subsidies for its cultural and educational operations. Religious groups normally register under both of these categories. For example, Mormons perform religious activities through their association of worship and operate a school through their cultural association.

Religious groups must apply at the local prefecture to be recognized as an association of worship and receive tax-exempt status. In order to qualify, the group's sole purpose must be the practice of religion, which may include religious training and the construction of buildings serving the religion. Among excluded activities are those purely cultural, social, or humanitarian in nature. The government does not tax associations of worship on donations they receive. If the prefecture determines an association is not in conformity with the law, however, the government may change the association's status and require it to pay taxes at a rate of 60 percent on future and past donations. According to the Ministry of Interior, approximately 109 Protestant, 100 Catholic, 50 Jehovah's Witnesses, 30 Muslim, and 15 Jewish associations have tax-exempt status.

Per a 1905 law separating church and state, the government does not directly finance religious groups to build new mosques, churches, synagogues, or temples. The government may, however, provide loan guarantees or lease property to groups at advantageous rates. It also exempts places of worship from property taxes. In addition, the government may fund cultural associations with a religious connection.

There are three French territories in which the 1905 law does not apply. Because Alsace-Lorraine was part of the German Empire during the passage of the 1905 law, members of Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, and Jewish groups there may

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choose to allocate a portion of their income tax to their religious group. Local governments may also provide financial support for building religious edifices. French Guyana, which is governed under the colonial laws of Charles X (1824-1830), may provide subsidies to the Catholic Church. The French Overseas Departments and Territories, which include island territories in the Atlantic, Caribbean, Pacific, and Indian oceans, and several peri-Antarctic islands as well as a claim in Antarctica, are also not subject to the 1905 law and may provide funding for religious groups within their territories.

A law approved in 2010 prohibits covering one's face in public places, including public transportation, government buildings, and other public spaces such as restaurants and movie theaters. If the police encounter someone in a public space wearing a face covering such as a mask or burqa, they ask the individual to remove it to verify the individual's identity. Police officials may not remove it themselves. If an individual refuses to remove the garment, police may take the person to the local police station to verify his or her identity. An individual, however, may not be questioned or held for more than four hours. Refusal to remove the face-covering garment after being instructed to do so by a police official carries a maximum fine of 150 euros (\$207) or attendance at a citizenship course.

Individuals who coerce another person to cover his or her face on account of gender, by threat, violence, force, or abuse of power or authority, are subject to a fine of 30,000 euros (\$41,322) and can receive a sentence of up to one year in prison. The fine and sentence are doubled if the victim is a minor.

The Interministerial Mission for Vigilance and to Combat Sectarian Abuses (MIVILUDES) observes and analyzes the activities of minority religious groups that have been labeled as "sects." It coordinates responses to abuses, violations of law, or threats to public order; informs the public; and provides assistance to victims. MIVILUDES publishes an annual report.

An inter-ministerial task force against racism and anti-Semitism (DILCRA), composed of senior civil servants, ensures the implementation of France's national action plan against racism and anti-Semitism for the period 2012-14. While the taskforce is located in the Ministry of Interior, its head, Prefect Regis Guyot, reports to both the prime minister and the minister of interior.

The Observatory for Secularism, established on April 8 by President Hollande, advises the government on the application of the principle of secularism, in compliance with the freedom of religion and belief. The observatory is composed

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of fifteen members who are senior civil servants, parliamentarians, legal experts, intellectuals, and experts in secularism.

Public schools are secular. The law prohibits public school employees and students from wearing conspicuous religious symbols, including the Muslim headscarf, Jewish skullcap, Sikh turban, and large Christian crosses. Religious instruction is not provided in public schools, except in the three territories previously mentioned. Facts about religious groups, however, are taught as part of the history curriculum. Parents who wish their children to wear religious symbols or to be given religious instruction in school may homeschool or send their children to a private school. Homeschooling and private schools must conform to the educational standards established for public schools. Public schools make an effort to supply special meals for students with religious dietary restrictions.

On September 9, National Education Minister Vincent Peillon unveiled a charter for secularism in schools which is posted in all state schools. The charter outlines in 15 points the main principles of the 1905 law separating religion and state. On September 10, the newly-established Observatory for Secularism, a government-appointed panel of experts, recommended the charter also be posted in private schools receiving government funds.

The government subsidizes private schools, including those affiliated with religious organizations. According to Ministry of Education data from the 2012-13 school year, nearly 16 percent, or about 8,800, of schools in France are private; 13.4 percent of French students (898,000) are enrolled in private institutions. Of the private schools, 97 percent are Catholic; the remaining private schools are Jewish, Muslim, Protestant, or not religiously affiliated. There are two million students attending 8,468 Catholic schools, and 30,500 Jewish students attending approximately 300 Jewish schools. There are also small numbers of students attending Protestant and Muslim schools. In 98 percent of private schools, the government pays the teacher's salaries, provided the school accepts all children regardless of the child's religious affiliation.

Missionaries from countries not exempted from entry visa requirements must obtain a three-month tourist visa before traveling to the country. All missionaries who wish to remain longer than 90 days must obtain long-duration visas before entering the country. Upon arrival, missionaries must provide a letter from their sponsoring religious group to apply with the local prefecture for a temporary residence card.

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The law affirms that “detained persons have the right to freedom of opinion, conscience, and religion. They can practice the religion of their choice … without other limits than those imposed by the security needs and good order of the institution.” According to the government, the number of prison chaplains has increased since 2008 and efforts are made to improve access to food appropriate for prisoners with religious dietary restrictions. Religious celebrations, such as Ramadan, are observed in prisons. According to the Ministry of Justice, the penitentiary system employed 668 Catholic, 339 Protestant, 164 Muslim, 75 Jewish, 30 Orthodox, and 35 “other” chaplains. In the general detainee visiting area, any visitor can bring objects of worship to an inmate or speak with the prisoner about religious issues, but may not pray. Prisoners may pray individually in their cells, with the chaplain in the designated prayer rooms, or, in some institutions, in special apartments in which they can receive family for up to 48 hours.

The government is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, formerly the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

Government Practices

From April 2011, when the ban on covering one’s face in public went into effect, to April 30, 2013, police stopped and questioned 705 women, with 661 convicted and fined. The government stated it had enacted the 2010 law prohibiting covering the face in public places to address security concerns. In practice, however, the law has prohibited Muslim women from wearing the burqa or niqab. Attempts by police officers to verify the identity of a woman wearing the banned face-covering veil led to two days of rioting, July 19-20, in the Paris suburb of Trappes. The woman’s husband was arrested for allegedly attacking the police officer conducting the identity check. An estimated 400 people demonstrated near the police station, where they set fire to garbage bins, destroyed bus stops, and threw projectiles at police. On November 8, the husband was found guilty of assaulting a police officer and received a three-month suspended sentence and a fine of 1,000 euros (\$1,377). The woman was charged with violating the ban on the face-covering veil and insulting a police officer. Her trial was postponed so the court could consider whether a constitutional review of the ban on the face-covering veil was needed.

On March 19, the Court of Cassation, France’s highest court of criminal and civil appeal, ruled a Muslim woman’s firing in 2008 for wearing a head scarf at work in

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a private child-care center in a Paris suburb was not in accordance with the law, which bans conspicuous religious symbols from public schools and institutions. The Court of Cassation's ruling effectively cancelled the woman's firing and overturned a lower court's decision, which had said the center had the right to set its own rules about religious neutrality. Per judicial procedure, the case was automatically referred back to the Paris appeals court to consider the Court of Cassation's decision and make its own ruling on the case.

In its November 27 decision, the Paris appeals court ruled against the employee and determined the private child-care center was acting within its rights to terminate the employee for wearing a conspicuous religious symbol while performing her duties. Further appeals were possible in the case though no court filings had been made by the end of the year.

On October 15, the Observatory for Secularism recommended the privately owned child-care center at the focus of this case modify its internal regulations to make them more restrictive concerning the wearing of the veil. The Observatory for Secularism rejected the need for a new secularism law specific to the early childhood sector.

The government continued efforts to promote interfaith understanding and combat racist, anti-Semitic, and anti-Muslim acts through public awareness campaigns and by encouraging dialogue among local officials, police, and citizen groups. Government leaders publicly condemned racist and other forms of violence. The government regularly investigated and prosecuted criminal behavior directed at religious groups, including anti-Muslim, anti-Semitic, and other similar crimes. Prosecutors were ordered to seek maximum punishments for hate crimes and to appeal sentences not considered adequate.

President Francois Hollande and other government ministers forcefully condemned anti-Semitism and stated support for Holocaust education on numerous occasions, including: the March 17 commemoration of the first anniversary of the killings of three Jewish children and their teacher by Mohammed Merah in Toulouse; the March 20 annual dinner hosted by France's largest Jewish umbrella organization, the Conseil Representatif des Institutions Juives de France (Representative Council of Jewish Institutions of France or CRIF); French Judaism Day on June 1; and the July 21 anniversary of the Vel d'Hiv roundup of Jews during World War II. On March 17, President Hollande said "anti-Semitism has not stopped after the tragedy in Toulouse, where children died for the same reason as those of the Vel d'Hiv and Drancy, because they were Jews." On March 20, President Hollande

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condemned anti-Semitism, which he said “is not only a hatred of Jews,” but also “a disdain for France.” He also said the fight against anti-Semitism must be waged through education and the Holocaust “must be taught everywhere, in all French schools and colleges, in our villages, in our cities, in our suburbs.”

On October 14, the police arrested three suspects in connection with a 2012 explosion in a kosher grocery store in the Paris suburb of Sarcelles. The investigation into the attack led to the dismantling of a reputed Islamist cell across the country with eighteen people placed under formal investigation for association with a terrorist group, including fourteen imprisoned at the end of the year.

For the seventh time since 2006, the “comedian” Dieudonne was found guilty of inciting discrimination, hatred, and violence against Jews. Dieudonne appeared in court on October 17 to respond to charges that he ridiculed the Holocaust in internet videos and was found guilty of incitement to hatred. After Dieudonne appealed the court’s decision, the appellate court ruled against him and imposed a 28,000 euro fine (\$38,567). Earlier in the year, two soldiers were photographed in front of a synagogue using the quenelle salute made popular by Dieudonne. The soldiers’ actions were condemned by the defense minister, who asked the army chief of staff to discipline the soldiers.

In a summary judgment made on November 13, a judge in Bobigny banned the sale of one book and censured parts of four others due to anti-Semitic content. All of the books were edited by Alain Soral, who was ordered to pay all court costs for the plaintiff, the League against Racism and Anti-Semitism (LICRA).

The government continued its efforts to extradite from Canada Hassan Diab, the prime suspect in a 1980 terrorist attack on a Paris synagogue that killed four people. After appealing the original 2011 Canadian extradition ruling, Diab also appealed an April 2012 order signed by the Canadian justice minister approving the extradition. At year’s end Diab remained in Canada.

On August 11, the Ministry of Interior announced the arrest of a soldier suspected of planning to shoot at a mosque in Venissieux, a Lyon suburb. The soldier was charged with the possession of ammunition and planning to damage a place of worship in connection with a terrorist enterprise.

On August 13, authorities in Avignon discovered anti-Muslim graffiti demeaning the Prophet Muhammad near the entrance to the Popes’ Palace. Police arrested an Italian citizen who said he painted the graffiti after an argument with several

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Moroccans. The Avignon Court convicted the Italian of “degradation and damage to a World Heritage monument.” He received a two-month suspended sentence. The Popes’ Palace and the city of Avignon lodged a complaint for vandalism, and the defendant was to be tried separately for religious insults.

The Ministry of Education continued to sponsor nationwide courses and competitive examinations designed to educate students about discrimination and tolerance. It partnered with LICRA to educate students about anti-Semitism and racism. LICRA provided educational tools, worked directly in schools, and organized trips to educate students about racism.

The government continued its efforts to demonstrate respect for Muslims, encouraging inter-religious dialogue, and stressing the importance of having more French imams and chaplains and greater control over foreign financing of mosques.

The Ministry of Interior continued to provide significant funding for an education program in Lyon, Paris, and Strasbourg entitled Religion, Secularism, and Interculturalism for 30 students per academic year. Initiated in collaboration with Catholic universities and local mosques, the program provided students, including future clerics, a broad understanding of French legal, historical, and social norms while avoiding theology. Government officials collaborated with academic specialists to create the curriculum. The training was well-received by the country’s religious communities and was open to high-level officials and clergy from all religious groups, as well as representatives of affiliated religious associations. Muslims expressed the greatest interest in the program, which also addressed the fact that most imams came from abroad and did not speak French, hindering communication with their congregations. The goal of this portion of the program was to develop an “Islam within France” and foster integration. The students were primarily immigrants from North and sub-Saharan Africa. On October 10, in Lyon, Minister of Interior Manuel Valls delivered the first “degrees of secularism” to twenty-eight French Muslim imams, teachers, and state employees who completed the program.

On numerous occasions, President Hollande and senior government officials, including the prime minister, met with Muslim leaders, including Dalil Boubakeur, President of the French Council of Muslim Faith (CFCM), and attended religious events. They strongly denounced anti-Muslim acts and stressed the government’s commitment to fight against acts of hatred directed against Muslims.

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On August 1, Minister of Interior Valls attended an iftar in the mosque of Ozoir-la-Ferriere that had been the target of anti-Muslim graffiti in February. He denounced the anti-Muslim acts, saying, “Too many words, too many gestures and too many hostilities are targeting France’s Muslims today.” He also gave assurances that “the Republic will always protect the Muslims of France.”

On January 31, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) condemned France for infringement of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion after ruling the government had violated article 9 of the European Convention on Religious Freedom by collecting taxes on the donations made to three religious associations, the Pyramid Temple, the Knights of the Golden Lotus, and the Evangelical Missionary Church. The court ordered the authorities to pay four million euros (\$5.5 million) for material loss to the associations.

On February 22, France's highest administrative court, the Council of State, reversed a lower court decision and granted Jehovah's Witnesses the right to consult state documents concerning them held by MIVILUDES. On October 16, the Council of State ruled it illegal for penitentiary authorities to refuse to permit Jehovah's Witnesses chaplains in prisons. Penitentiary authorities had denied the chaplains access to prisons on the grounds that the number of observant detainees was not sufficient to warrant their presence.

On October 16, the Court of Cassation upheld the 2009 fraud conviction of the Church of Scientology. The church had been convicted of pressuring members to pay tens of thousands of euros for personality tests, vitamin cures, sauna sessions, and “purification packs.” Five church leaders had each been fined from 10,000 to 30,000 euros (\$13,774 to \$41,322) and four had received suspended jail sentences of up to two years. The group announced it would bring a complaint to the ECHR.

Members of the Sikh community continued to express concern about the law prohibiting public school employees and students from wearing conspicuous religious symbols, urging the government to exempt them from this law.

On September 26, the United Nations Human Rights Committee concluded the government had violated the religious freedom of a Sikh man when he was asked to remove his turban for his passport photograph.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

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There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. The majority of these acts were anti-Semitic or anti-Muslim. Representatives from the Jewish and Muslim communities, the Protestant Federation, and the Catholic Conference of Bishops, among other prominent societal leaders, took positive steps to condemn intolerance and promote religious freedom. Because ethnicity and religion were often inextricably linked, it was difficult to categorize some incidents specifically as ethnic or religious intolerance. The National Consultative Commission on Human Rights' annual report for 2012 noted sharp increases in anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim attacks. These incidents included verbal harassment; physical assaults; vandalism, including desecration of places of worship; and internet and media hate speech.

According to the National Observatory against Islamophobia's annual report, anti-Muslim acts and threats increased by 11.3 percent from 2012 to 2013. The Observatory, part of the CFCM, reported that 226 anti-Muslim acts (62 actions and 164 threats) were recorded by law enforcement in 2013. The highest concentration of incidents was in Paris's Ile-de-France region. This was the lowest increase in three years, as the number of incidents had increased by 34 percent in 2012, and by 28 percent in 2011. Abdallah Zekri, the Observatory's president, noted these statistics did not take into account that "many Muslims do not want to file a complaint after they have been subjected to Islamophobic acts." The NGO Collective against Islamophobia in France (CCIF) registered 469 anti-Muslim acts in 2012, a 57 percent increase compared to 2011, when 298 acts were reported.

A poll conducted by the market research firm Ipsos for *Le Monde*, the Center of Political Research of the Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po), and the Jean-Jaures Foundation released in January indicated that 74 percent of individuals questioned believed Islam is an "intolerant" religion and not compatible with the values of French society.

Another poll conducted by market research firm CSA in December 2012 and released in March found that 22 percent of respondents had a positive opinion of Islam. The poll also found that 91 percent of respondents felt wearing a full, face-covering veil would create problems in society for the wearer, and 77 percent felt wearing a headscarf would be problematic.

On June 13, a pregnant Muslim woman was attacked in the Parisian suburb of Argenteuil by two men who tried to remove her head scarf and cut off her hair. The woman, who had been kicked in the stomach, suffered a miscarriage four days after the attack. On June 19, the Pontoise prosecutor's office opened a judicial

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investigation for gang assault, which was ongoing. The attackers had not been identified at year's end.

Between July 2 and July 12, three young Muslim women, all wearing a head covering, were attacked in separate incidents in Reims. The perpetrators physically assaulted two of the women and threatened to kill another; two of the victims also reported their attackers used racial insults. Police questioned and released one suspect, and the investigations continued at year's end.

From mid-August to mid-November in separate attacks, vandals sprayed racist phrases and images on the exterior walls of five mosques. The perpetrators used phrases like "Get out Arabs" and "Death to Muslims" along with swastikas in attacks on two mosques in Besancon and one each in Carpentras, Pau, and Crepy-en-Valois. Officials are investigating the incidents.

The Jewish Community Protection Service reported a 58 percent increase in anti-Semitic incidents in 2012 compared with 2011. Data for 2013 was unavailable at year's end. The Ministry of Interior recorded a total of 175 violent racist incidents nation-wide in 2012 and identified 55 percent of them to be anti-Semitic.

Anti-Semitic acts and threats recorded by France's National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (with assistance from the Jewish Community Protection Service) increased from 389 to 614 from 2011 to 2012, the last full years for which data was available. The European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) survey on anti-Semitism, released in November, found 51 percent of 1,192 French respondents (out of a "core Jewish population" of 480,000) had experienced or observed anti-Semitic verbal or physical attacks and 76 percent of respondents had not reported these incidents to the police; 88 percent believed anti-Semitism had gotten worse over the past five years; and 46 percent had considered emigrating because of anti-Semitism.

According to statistics released on November 25 by the Jewish Agency, 2,185 French Jews had immigrated to Israel ("made *Aliyah*") in the first nine months of 2013, a near 50 percent increase compared to the same period in 2012. At least one leader in the Jewish community linked the increase in *Aliyah* to the rise in violent acts against Jews.

On February 21, masked men reportedly flashing Nazi salutes attacked fans of English soccer club Tottenham Hotspur in a bar in Lyon, injuring three. Police arrested some of the attackers and are investigating the connection between the

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violence and anti-Semitism, as the team's fan base includes a large Jewish following.

On June 19, several individuals attacked their neighbors, a Jewish family from the Paris suburb of Seine-et-Marne, after an argument. One of the individuals used a crowbar to hit members of the family, causing two broken wrists. The individuals shouted anti-Semitic slurs. The Melun tribunal issued a summons directing all parties to appear in court on January 14, 2014.

Twitter announced it had passed to French authorities on July 12 the names of those responsible for posting anti-Semitic messages following the 2012 creation of a micro-blogging site by a user with the hashtag #unbonjuif ("a good Jew"). The hashtag, whose purpose was to spread anti-Semitic jokes, was the third most popular tagged subject in the country within a week of its creation. Anti-racist and Jewish organizations complained, and the Jewish Student Union in France (UEJF) brought legal action.

The Ministry of Interior reported a 5 percent increase in anti-Catholic incidents in 2012, the last year for which information was available, compared with 2011. Between January and August 2012, the ministry reported that 233 churches and chapels were vandalized and 135 cemeteries desecrated.

Jehovah's Witnesses officials reported 63 acts of vandalism on places of worship and 44 cases where members were physically attacked. These figures represent a 63 percent increase in violent acts against Jehovah's Witnesses since 2011.

Several interfaith efforts to promote tolerance and non-discrimination occurred in 2013. On March 17, interfaith events in Toulouse and Montauban commemorated the victims of the seven murders committed by Mohamed Merah in 2012. In June dozens of imams visited a Holocaust memorial in Drancy, site of a former detention camp for thousands of Jews before they were deported to Nazi death camps in World War II.

The French Judeo-Muslim Friendship organization, in partnership with the city of Paris, held its annual gala on October 6. Junior Minister for Urban Affairs Francois Lamy and other major figures from the political, religious, and civil society spheres attended to emphasize dialogue and understanding between the two religious groups.

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In an annual event begun in 2008, a series of interfaith dialogues took place between Jewish and Muslim communities across the country between October 25 and 27. Jews and Muslims, along with government and community leaders, gathered in 30 different places of worship to discuss belief systems, recent government actions, and religious activities in an effort to facilitate communication and understanding between the two groups.

The Council of Christian Churches, composed of three seven-member delegations representing the Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox churches, continued to serve as a forum for dialogue among the major Christian churches. A three-member delegation represented the Armenian Apostolic Church and one observer represented the Anglican Communion on the council.

Regular and on-going interfaith dialogue among the Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and Jewish communities addressed and issued statements on various national and international themes. The Roman Catholic Bishops Conference celebrated the 40th anniversary of its National Service for Relations with Islam, an organization for interfaith engagement with Muslims, and hosted an annual training session on Islam to maintain regular contacts with Muslim associations.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government continued to discuss religious freedom with the government, and the embassy actively promoted interfaith dialogue and tolerance among the country's major religious groups, particularly focusing on relations between the Muslim and Jewish communities. Engagement was often conducted in collaboration with U.S. consulates general and American presence posts (APPs).

Embassy representatives met with government officials responsible for religious freedom matters to discuss religious freedom and tolerance, including the increase in anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim actions during the year. Embassy officers also met regularly with private citizens, religious groups, and NGOs involved with religious freedom. Embassy officials discussed religious freedom with senior representatives from the major religious groups and hosted meetings with the CRIF, CFCM, and Catholic priests working on interfaith dialogue. The embassy also conducted regular outreach to Muslim communities throughout the country. Department of State representatives visited to conduct outreach activities.

Specifically, the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism met with religious, community, and government leaders to discuss anti-Semitism and racism in France.

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The embassy conducted outreach programs to minority communities throughout the country. The embassy also supported NGO projects furthering the values of tolerance and coexistence. One example was a significant grant to Graines de France for its program Empowerment against Xenophobia, designed to provide skills and tools to promote tolerance and combat anti-Muslim sentiment and actions. Another was Diplomats of Diversity, a program enabling young people from underprivileged and diverse religious backgrounds to explore issues of religious and other tolerance with American counterparts. The embassy also supported NGO Coexister's World Interfaith Tour, in which students of various religious backgrounds explore interreligious dialogue throughout the world and then tour France sharing their experiences and insights.

The Consuls General in Strasbourg and Marseille and the APP officers in Toulouse, Rennes, Bordeaux, and Lyon met with and participated in outreach to Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish communities.

APP Lyon hosted an iftar with leaders of Lyon's Muslim community. The rector of the Lyon Grand Mosque spoke of the importance this event held for himself and other Muslims in Lyon, noting APP Lyon was the only office or agency that offered his community an iftar.

APP Rennes organized a year-long program for disadvantaged youth from recent immigrant and religious minority communities in Angers to encourage leadership and deepen mutual understanding. The program was coordinated in partnership with the city of Angers, the English language library there, and the Duxbury, Massachusetts library.

APP Bordeaux organized several visits to the district's main mosque as well as to the Bordeaux synagogue. Muslim youth and leaders became regular partners of APP Bordeaux, joining APP representatives at Martin Luther King Day celebrations and helping APP Bordeaux identify suitable candidates for exchange programs. APP Bordeaux further developed this relationship by organizing a video conference with Washington for local Muslim representatives and the Secretary's Special Representative to Muslim Communities.